



# Does Design Tip the Scales?

**W**alter Thorson says: "Adam naming the creatures forms the biblical paradigm for science." "Naming" involves the use of reason and the powers of description. When the material world is named, it is subjected to our mundane scrutiny.

Science, however, is more than descriptive. It is a tool by which scientists detect as well as describe. This differentiation between detection and description is helpful in understanding the limits that should be placed upon scientific work. Because science is a human tool powered by "creaturely reason," Thorson refuses to allow science to describe or to name God the Transcendent One, and maybe Thorson says that well. However, can science be used to detect God, or at least detect design? I submit that detecting design in no way subjects God to our mundane scrutiny and human reason.

Traditionally theists, as well as deists, allow for the detection of God as Creator via the created world. That is, the existence of the universe implies a creator. Even Thorson's use of the words "creatures" and "creaturely" tacitly indicates detection of a Creator God. Can a theist detect the existence of a sunset via the eyeball tool and ascribe glory to God the Creator? Similarly, can we, who detect design (or functional logic) via the scientific tool, ascribe glory to God the Designer?

The detection of design or the detection of functional logic may lead a person to desire an understanding, or further "naming," of the designer or the logician. The naming of the Judeo-Christian God comes as we read the Bible. As Thorson indicates, the God of the Bible is known not through reason, mundane scrutiny, and subjection. God revealed himself perfectly in Jesus Christ. We relate on a personal level by repentance and faith to a personal God who created us and designed our universe.

Having said the above, I tangle the argument. Does the detection of uncertainty in quantum theory imply philosophical uncertainty in the same sense that the detection of design in the natural realm implies that God is a designer? Maybe so. Here, understanding and using "naturalism" in the usual sense of the word is important. In a naturalistic world view, the natural world in its totality is woven together in a seamless tapestry where uncertainty, chance, relativity, and the fluke of design are all bound together with morals, religions, cultures, and peoples. In this world view, the scientific detection of uncertainty probably could imply philosophical uncertainty in the areas of morals and religion.

If, however, we start with the God of the Bible as Creator, the "design fluke" is set in a context where its detection has great ramifications. The hard to explain "design fluke" is now explainable: God designed the world. Equally evident in a world created by God are chance, relativity, and uncertainty. In a Christian world view the elements of chance, relativity, uncertainty, and even design are not bound together with morals, religions, cultures, and peoples as in the naturalistic world view. That is, detection of relativity, uncertainty, or design by scientific tools powered by human reason is not descriptive or proscriptive in the moral realm or in the religious realm. God stands above and outside. He is transcendent, yet he has revealed his wishes to us supremely in Jesus Christ through whom morals and religious values are described and proscribed.

In conclusion, I submit that the detection of design does not subject God to mundane scrutiny, nor does the detection of uncer-

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## Dialogue: Response

*What is the Logic of Functional Organization?*

tainty subject ultimate reality to mundane scrutiny. Neither design nor uncertainty is descriptive or proscriptive for God or for the human race. Since design can be detected, the question remains: Does the detection of design amid the detection of chance, uncertainty, and relativity tip the scales toward belief in the God of the Bible? While the design movement is of great interest for many Christians, design detection will probably not tip the scales for an unbeliever because a naturalistic world view gives philosophical uncertainty equal footing. ◇

# What is the Logic of Functional Organization?

**Organization directed to function [is] the essential feature of living organisms.**

Thorson has argued that “God and his mysterious agency in creation are not subject to mundane scrutiny; knowledge of God depends entirely on God’s sovereign and gracious choice to be known personally” (p. 12). This seems to me entirely consistent with experience—“God’s agency in creation” is readily recognized by those with faith, and routinely denied by those without it—and with what Scripture teaches both positively (Hebrews 11:3) and negatively (Romans 1:18–20) on the subject. Creatively knowledge of creation is therefore necessarily restricted, and “scientific naturalism” is an apt description of an approach that respects the limited scope of unregenerate rationality.

But as Thorson says, such matters are likely to remain academic unless they have real consequences for science, and he proposes that “we need a new ‘naturalistic’ biological science which is more than the application of physical science to biosystems” (p. 13).

Thorson argues that what distinguishes the biological world is that it is shaped by purpose:

What makes biological systems distinctive (and transcends purely physical description) is that they embody, at every level from a whole organism down to the molecular structure of the cell and its constituent parts and processes, a logic controlling achievement of certain tasks or functions. This abstract logic (rather than the causal logic of physical mechanisms) is what explains the particular organization of physical/chemical structure present (p. 15).

Thorson is, I believe, exactly right in emphasizing *organization directed to function* as the essential feature of living organisms. A simple thought experiment is instructive. Consider at what stage of biological complexity “life” is identifiable. Molecules themselves—even biological macromolecules and their assemblies—are not “alive” (references to the “native” conformation of a functional molecule notwithstanding); nor are individual organelles (filaments, vesicles, membranes, etc.) “alive.” But when large numbers of such components are *organized* in appropriate ways to form a cell, the features we identify as “life” emerge from the interactions of the components. The goal of cell biology is to discover the “logic” that produces this functional organization. ◇

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